PREVENTING WORK-RELATED INJURIES

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Each day, an average of 16 U.S. workers die and 9,000 suffer disabling occupational injuries.
- Occupational injuries were estimated to have cost the U.S. at least $240 billion in 1999.
- Leading causes of fatal occupational injuries are highway-related (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumamv.html), homicides (www.cdc.gov/niosh/violenpg.html), and falls (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumafall.html), which account for nearly 3,000 worker deaths annually.
- In 2000, there were 677 work-related homicides. An estimated 1.7 million workers are injured each year in work-related assaults.
- Continuous change in technology and the design and organization of work, as well as persistent hazards, create constant demands for new research and information to protect workers from injury.

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducts the Nation's principal research program for the prevention of work-related injuries (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/trauma.html). Through its intramural and extramural programs, NIOSH scientists, as well as researchers and professionals at universities and state agencies throughout the United States, engage in all aspects of injury prevention. These scientists and professionals conduct a) injury surveillance to identify potential risk factors and monitor trends over time; b) engineering research to develop and improve workplace protections (e.g., safety systems for machinery and protective equipment for workers); c) intervention studies to evaluate the real-world effectiveness of protection strategies; and d) communication programs to ensure that employers, managers, workers, and safety and health professionals have ready access to the latest injury prevention information. The traumatic injury research program focuses on the leading causes of injury and death and on the highest risk industry sectors (i.e., agriculture (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumaagric.html), mining (www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining), and construction (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumastruct.html)). Since 1980, this program has helped reduce the rate of fatal occupational injuries nationwide by 45%.

Example of program in action: NIOSH has made recommendations for preventing work-related violence based on available data and research (www.cdc.gov/niosh/violenpg.html). Recently, NIOSH also launched a $2 million initiative to fund research (www.cdc.gov/niosh/vioprevgrants.html) to better understand risk factors in a variety of work settings. Findings from this research will support the development of additional targeted prevention strategies.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Although traumatic injury rates are decreasing in many industry sectors and occupational groups, workplace injury still takes a huge toll on the American workforce. Research is needed to address persistent hazards (e.g., falls in construction, tractor rollovers in agriculture, and back injuries in health care) as well as emerging hazards (e.g., highway construction work zones (www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumazone.html)).

For additional information on this and other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh. *March 2003*